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Chin not on polygraph since 1970, CIA admits

By Warren Strobel
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CIA Director William J. Casey said that about 15 percent of the agency's employees escaped its lie detector program over the last 10 years and that convicted spy Larry Wu-Tai Chin "was one of those missed."

Mr. Casey disclosed the gap in the agency's security program in a letter last month to Rep. Patricia Schroeder, Colorado Democrat.

He said agency policy calls for security reinvestigations, including a polygraph test, every five years for all employees.

But, he said, "competing demands on limited investigative and polygraph resources have prevented us from reaching 100 percent of our employees and, unfortunately, Mr. Chin was one of those missed."

Chin, a naturalized U.S. citizen, was convicted last Friday on 17 counts of espionage, income tax fraud and failing to report money held in a foreign bank. His spying career as an employee of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a semi-public CIA office, allegedly covered more than three decades.

In papers filed in federal court before his trial, prosecutors stated that Chin received in 1970 the only polygraph test he would undergo during his 30 years with the CIA — a test which he passed.

Mr. Casey's letter was in reply to an inquiry from Mrs. Schroeder about CIA polygraph policy.

His disclosure follows the revelation by CIA Deputy Director for Operations John Stein, in a closed congressional hearing 20 months before Chin's arrest, that polygraphs are of questionable value in interrogating non-Americans.

Mr. Stein testified in a February 1984 closed hearing on a proposed plan to use polygraphs for investigating unauthorized news leaks to the media. According to unclassified portions of the hearings before the House Judiciary Committee, he said the polygraph "is an excellent investigative tool in large part

because the Americans who are tested on the polygraph react.

"The polygraph works less well with [certain ethnic groups], for example, who are in a culture where telling someone what you think they want to know is an accepted norm," Mr. Stein said. "Lying is not accepted in the United States and, therefore, the polygraph works somewhat better."

Mr. Casey said in his Jan. 21 letter to Mrs. Schroeder that the CIA has been forced to limit polygraph tests to priority employees.

"Until we get the resources we need, our priorities for investigations are (1) new applicants; (2) employees completing their three-year probationary period; (3) employees returning from overseas; and (4) employees who have not been reinvestigated in the last five years," Mr. Casey said.

His letter came after Mrs. Schroeder wrote to inquire why Chin was given only a single test and to confirm a statement by retired Gen. Richard Stilwell, a security expert, that more sophisticated polygraph procedures have been developed since 1970.

"Over the years, the CIA polygraph program has gone through many evaluations and some changes," Mr. Casey said. "All aspects have been affected, including polygraph instrumentation, polygraph examiner selection and training, examination techniques, and the quality control procedures."

Mrs. Schroeder chairs a subcommittee of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, which shares jurisdiction over government polygraph practices.

The congresswoman could not be reached for comment yesterday, and an aide to the subcommittee declined comment on Mrs. Schroeder's reaction to the CIA director's letter.

CIA spokeswoman Patti Volz said, "That's not something I can talk about."

"We consider correspondence from the director to anybody personal and confidential," Ms. Volz said. "I can't even confirm that there is such a letter."